
Philosophy of Command

And Commander's Guidance

MAJOR DREW A. BENNETT

Because of the pace of operations on the modern battlefield, the range of possible conflicts, and the use of mission type orders, a commander will find it necessary to formalize his intent. A good commander, however, will begin to develop his philosophy of command and his commander's guidance long before the deployment of his troops.

A philosophy of command covers a commander's general beliefs about the way things should work in a perfect world. A commander's guidance covers specific instructions for day-to-day operations, most of which will be in a peacetime environment.

Upon assuming command, an officer will find it beneficial to give definite shape to his philosophy and guidance by putting it in a written document and issuing it to his immediate subordinates. At company level, this is particularly important in orienting and guiding inexperienced and impressionable platoon leaders.

Although each commander's philosophy and guidance will reflect his own personality, style, and priorities, as a company commander I found the following philosophy and guidance effective in communicating to my junior officers what I wanted done and how I wanted it done.

PHILOSOPHY

Responsibility. *A leader is responsible for everything his unit does or fails to do. You are responsible for ensuring that your troops are fed, paid, quartered, rested, physically conditioned, supplied,*

administratively processed, informed, trained, motivated, and rewarded, as appropriate. Others — the S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, XO, first sergeant, police sergeant, or anyone else — may assist you, guide you, monitor you, and evaluate you, but only you are responsible.

Every member of this company must believe that his chain of command cares about him and will look out for him. If a soldier has a problem, he must know that his leaders will do everything in their power to assist him and continue to do so until his problem is corrected. While this responsibility will be a serious burden for you, it will also be the source of enormous satisfaction if you exercise it right.

Authority. *As an officer, you are entrusted with a significant amount of authority. When carrying out my intent, you may act in my behalf with all of the authority that my billet carries with it. If you make an honest mistake, I will back you even if you are wrong. Whatever kind of mistake you make, no one will reprimand you without my approval; I will act as a buffer between you and higher headquarters so that you can do your job.*

This does not mean that you will be protected if you display incompetence or negligence. It does not imply that you may use any means possible to accomplish your desires. We operate within a system, and I expect you to make that system work. I do not believe in the "midnight requisition," for example, or telling your men, "I don't care how you do it, just get it done." Operating within the system does not

rule out using ingenuity and initiative. It is these two traits that will make you successful on the modern battlefield. Many of the problems you will face will not have an exact solution or a procedure that you can pull from a manual or another written source. Remember that you are a leader with the authority to determine what is right, what is wrong, and what needs to be done.

I do not subscribe to the "zero defects" philosophy (except in matters concerning integrity). You and I will make mistakes. When you make a mistake I will point it out to you. Don't get your feelings hurt, and don't think that I am generally unhappy with you. My purpose is only to increase your potential as an officer and a leader. Just don't make the same mistake twice.

Integrity, however, is the bedrock of the officer corps. Without it you will never get the cooperation of your subordinates, the respect of your peers, or the trust of your seniors. In this profession, honesty is not just the best policy, it must be the only policy. You can recover from a deficiency in any other leadership trait, but not from a lapse in integrity.

Supervision. *I don't believe in micro-management, but I do believe in supervision. It is impossible to lead from behind a desk. You should be with most of your unit most of the time, and if you want your orders carried out, you will have to supervise. As the old adage goes, "You get what you inspect, not what you expect."*

As for me, I will be present, observing your unit both in the field and in

garrison. I don't want you to stop training when I am there or to prepare a "dog and pony show" for me. Additionally, don't be intimidated if I offer negative feedback. I will not allow errors to pass uncorrected.

Readiness. *Our mission is to fight, and we don't have the luxury of knowing when, where, or for how long. Consequently, you must maintain a state of readiness — mentally, physically, and materially — both in your personnel and in yourself. When we go into combat (note I did not say "if" we go into combat), it will be too late to take care of family problems, train your men, improve your upper body strength, or turn in damaged equipment. You may never achieve 100 percent readiness, but if you don't make readiness a priority, your unit will never survive the first firefight.*

Leadership. *The people in your unit are no better and no worse than those who win division competitions or go to the Olympic games. But you have already been issued the personnel, and if you want the best unit in the world all you need to do is exercise the proper leadership. I challenge you to make this your goal.*

To gain the willing obedience of your unit, be enthusiastic and tactful. Anyone can be a bully; it takes more to be a leader. But you are not running a popularity contest. There is only one standard and you must enforce it.

GUIDANCE

Safety. *In combat the mission will come before the welfare of the troops, and their safety will depend on their training. In peacetime, however, nothing is more important than safety. This does not mean we cannot train aggressively but we must also train safely.*

Safety will be enforced on and off duty, on and off post, and everyone is a safety officer. An injury caused by a lack of safety reduces our combat power just as much as an injury caused by the enemy.

Training. *Use every available second of time to train. Battles are won during*

training.

- *Don't wait for someone else to train your unit.*

- *A unit is only as good as the weakest person in it.*

- *Dead time will be used for concurrent training. All platoon leaders and platoon sergeants will carry a contingency lesson plan with them at all times and be prepared to teach that class whenever the opportunity presents itself. Use every available second of time to train.*

- *Every class will have a complete lesson plan, a prepared instructor, appropriate training aids, practical application, and evaluation.*

- *Instructors will rehearse.*

- *The training schedule will be followed as to time, date, place, and duration unless officially changed by the appropriate authority.*

- *Hope and luck have nothing to do with success. Skill and training defeat fear and ignorance.*

Mission Accomplishment. *When I give you a task, you have three options:*

- *You can complete the assigned task by the deadline.*

- *You can come in well ahead of the deadline and explain to me why you cannot complete the task. For example, because of the situation or other commitments, you may need more time, guidance, men, money, or supplies.*

- *You can come in and tell me you refuse to perform that task. (Be very careful using this option, but I would expect you to refuse to perform a task you considered unethical, illegal, or immoral.)*

Putting me off or just not accomplishing the task by the deadline is not an option. The primary criteria I will use to evaluate you will be how you and your unit accomplish the mission.

I do not believe in nonconcurrency through silence. If you don't agree with something, speak up and say why. You may be right! It does no good to say — after an exercise or training evolution — "I knew that was a bad idea."

When I pass guidance, information, or orders to you and you walk out the door, I am convinced from that point on that you understand, you want to

obey, and you are able to obey. If that is not the case, don't walk out and allow the conversation to end. That is your responsibility, not mine. If you show me a better solution, I will either do it your way or explain to you why I can't or won't.

Finally, although I am open to discussion, once a decision has been made I expect complete compliance with the spirit and the letter of my orders. Dissension and sarcasm have no place in the company.

First Sergeant's Role. *The role of the first sergeant is not just administrative. Because of his acknowledged level of experience, he is also the source of advice on a variety of issues, and I value him highly. At the same time, I realize that he is not exempt from rendering military courtesy. He is available to all members of the command and will serve as the company mentor, and I encourage you to learn from him. If you differ with the first sergeant, remember that he has the company's interests at heart.*

I will ask his advice on all enlisted matters and many other issues. His presence will be felt throughout the command as an example of success. (I have often noticed that officers who need the first sergeant's assistance least are the ones who ask for it the most and those who need it the most are the most resentful of it.)

Personal Example. *Your actions speak louder than words. Your example establishes your credibility and provides a constant communication that cannot be misunderstood.*

Remember that you are a leader 24 hours a day; you are never "off duty." Your personal appearance should always be immaculate, in and out of uniform. You must represent the highest standard, never the minimum. In front of the troops there is sometimes a place for humor, but never for horse-play.

In the field, you should endure the same hardships as those around you and then some. Be the first one up and the last to sleep. Eat last, after everyone else has been fed. Clean your weapon yourself; do not have anyone else clean it for you.

Professionalism. A true professional does not look at a difficult task and expound on why it cannot be done. He looks at it and then finds ways of doing what needs to be done. Be positive and enthusiastic at all times.

- Be proactive instead of reactive. Anticipate problems and requirements. Remember that "time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted."

- Be in the right place at the right time in the right uniform and ready for the task at hand. Be well-prepared with your subordinates, with your peers, and with your seniors.

- Spend at least as much time and effort rewarding the people who work for you as you do punishing them.

Generally speaking, for every Article 15 there should be a certificate of commendation, and for every court martial conducted, a medal awarded.

I trust that my philosophy of command and guidance will help you understand what is expected of you beyond the tried and true leadership traits and principles. I am convinced that no job is more challenging and personally rewarding, or more fun, than that of an infantry second lieutenant. I want you to come in happy and proud every day. Because of the demands of your job and the nature of our business, there may be days when you leave proud but unhappy, but those days should be few and far between. If that

is not the case, let me know. I want you to enjoy your job as much as I intend to enjoy mine.

A commander who formalizes his philosophy of command and his commander's guidance and issues it in writing to his subordinates will find that his company functions better, both in peacetime and in times of conflict.

Major Drew A. Bennett, a U.S. Marine Corps officer, is S-3 of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division, now assigned to Operation DESERT SHIELD. He previously commanded a rifle company in the same battalion. He is a 1977 Naval ROTC graduate of Tulane University and holds a master's degree from Golden Gate University.

U-COFT Effectiveness

WALTER G. BUTLER

The Unit-Conduct-of-Fire Trainers (U-COFTs) for the M1 tank and the M2 and M3 Bradley vehicles are part of the Army's program of developing and fielding training simulators. U.S. Army commanders have available to them a wide array of training equipment that is designed to help maintain or improve the performance of the soldiers and units in critical combat skills. Along with this training equipment, however, commanders also need objective information on the effectiveness of the equipment in a field environment and on ways of integrating it into the unit's training program. This information is now available for the U-COFTs.

A U-COFT provides training to vehicle commander and gunner teams that was previously available only on live fire ranges, and allows a team to train in a simulated vehicle crew station in a series of engagements with one or more threat targets portrayed through

computer-generated imagery. The engagements can occur under situations of day or night, with clear or reduced visibility conditions, in a clean or contaminated environment, with a fully operational or degraded vehicle, and in

an offensive or a defensive posture.

They are organized into exercises, with each having five to ten engagements. The exercises, in turn, are arranged in a training matrix (Figure 1). An instructor/operator (I/O) can

